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outposts

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FREDERICK GRUBB

Talented Families

UNCOMMON people? Yes, but commonness
Is not so rare you cannot breed from it
Excellence from so many love mischances.
To dine out on one's past can be a bore
But as for mine, I know full well, although it
Flowers changeless in my Quaker silences

Gentility's gone sour upon the hills
And the house pitch-forked on the property market
Several times (all things are relative).
Yet as the distempered winter sun distils
Chaotic light on my native heath, I see fit
To bless the way my birthplace shifts its scenes.

Heredity made them value upbringing
Which made heredity seem splendour,
But there were names hushed up, arrangements made
Behind the screen, as the fine voice was singing;
And adages that always made one wonder:
Piety before plenty,—but plenty.

The cancered claws of upstart usury
—In fashionable gloves—was not their aim
But values exalted in liberal commonalty.
There is small virtue in a house fallen asunder,
In a serious line's—although we love it—
Arrogant fantasy of lost grandeur.

Successful ancestries, which climbed the heights
With all the best equipment, many guides,
And, having once started, never looked back
(Staring summits in the eye) at battle sites
In obscure valleys, where history's asides
Speak in the nameless and foresuffered dead.

MARTIN BELL

Ode to Himself

I

GO on, good monkey, make your bow, be me.
Appear as the polite one, the sensitive
Shy one, awkward but helpful,
Monkey of wisecracks, monkey who knows the words.

This social creature must ignore
All his disgraces, all the deplorable monkeys:
(They antic behind his back as if they were at home):
There's evil-tempered monkey with weak rage,
Envious idle incompetent monkey,
A spiteful mimic of more handsome apes,
Belching wasteful monkey, timid
Monkey of tiny dishonesties.

Sad monkey, a self-pitying one,
Unlucky monkey, monkey who was framed
By mean streets in the shabby years—
Poor wretch of a monkey
In the freezing winds of time,
Almost a brass monkey.

Miniature snarling super-ego monkey
Squatting on the shoulder of the gross orang-outang,

And stinking cynical monkey
Planning small satisfactions
In face of an abstract nothing.

What a nest of nasty negative monkeys!

II

Safer not postulate a central *me*
To be ambitious about all this,
This chattering toy-shop-ful of monkey-puppets.
No puppet-master stoops
To curb their messy antics; monkey business
Must be endured
If only as talk in the head.

To watch is possible. Therefore you must watch.
Sit down. Sit still. Eat your damned apple up.
The largest virtue is to pay attention.
Then watch intently, watcher in the dark—
Watch how a jangling piano-range of strings
Dangles a reigning Kong for every minute,
Wearing your tie, your beard, your spectacles,
Inflections of your voice and gestures of your hands—
Grimaces and grimaces and grimaces

Old monkeys never die, fight back and never die.
They might fade away if you watch them.

And some already folding up their strings
Will lie down neatly in a cardboard box.
R.I.P. monkey. Then again R.I.P. monkey.

New beasts keep crowding in the wings.
Here come the vulgarest clowns, red-cheeked baboons
With their pea-nuts and bananas.
Out-stare them staunchly. Watch.

III

The legends say the monkeys drift to sleep
Under clear scrutiny of evening sky,
Puff into cloud-shapes, float away.

And branches prick, impressive silhouette,
Pattern of monkey-puzzle tree.

JACK CLEMO

Lines to the Blind

YOU wonder that I do not bow
To the gods of a sealed land:
My fate is so like yours, but I am swept
By an outer light, sharing no boast or vow
Of the afflicted, the submissive band.

Why should I track my way
To men's minds through clotted Braille,
Cold gooseflesh on the corpse of words?
My song is the clear-eyed bird's
As I blaze a trail
Where earth lies normal in the blithe day.

I pioneer for you,
But the gulf is too wide
And you cannot see my clue.
I do not have to overcome,
I do not face the worst, I do not accept:
I just speed home
With no flake of darkness admitted or defied.

Your skilled courage is not for me:
I have overstepped,
By God's grace, some mark or boundary
Where faith branches higher
And its vagabond thrills never cool.
I am wild with expectation, full of strange fire
That would scorch a blind man's tools.

HELEN SPALDING

Fear

IN the red cave beneath the hill
They made the image out of stone;
They carved it from the jutting wall
Where yellow fungus had once grown.

And ten times greater than their own
They made its stature; day by day
The image grew to human form
As crimson rock was cut away.

They climbed and bruised their hands and feet
To carve the lips, the eyes, the nose;
They laboured hard to finish it
Before the river waters rose.

And when the shape was smoothed at last
A great assembly filled the cave:
A total people: ruler, priest,
Leader and follower, master, slave.

The big blank face was dark, obscured
In hanging shadow; they could not see
How like themselves it was. They stared
Into the dark where the face would be.

Even the men who worked it gazed
Wondering, remote now, as they stood
One with the crowd that prayed and praised,
Invoked its might, proclaimed its good.

And as the first rain broke,
As the first shock of thunder came,
They sensed access of virtue, took
Strength from the utterance of its name.

And when the first rock fell,
And a chance few were crushed and killed,
They knew the image must be real:
Life had been given, and blood spilled.

And as the whole roof poised, thrust
A scythe of wind through the stupid air,
Tore open, cataracted dust,
Roared down, pounded and pulped its lair,

There was no time to understand.
There was no witness, least of all
The image: storm-loosened with the land
It shuddered, cracked, slid down the wall

And piled up broken stone on stone.
The river waters rose that year
Less than usual. The herds alone
Survived, unable to envisage fear.

ANTHONY CONRAN

You and I and Every Man Jack of Us

YOU and I and every man Jack of us
Walk with the Siamese twin of a corpse
In a three-legged drawl to All
Hallows and Sinners, alive-alive-O;
And the first act demanded
Of every man Jack of us
Is to come clean,
Strict with the quick and the dead
To account for the twin
That bangs our knees,
And to see straight
That we have no part in it,
Nor are we dead.

It is not true that the world wins,
Or the self-lusting science wins,
Or the advert supplants the ode,
Or that you can bribe our God,
Or explain away
The peace that passeth all
Understanding like a tall
Story to a drunk. It is not true
That the corpse knocking your knees
Has the answer; and if neither have you,
It means nothing to him,
For whom nothing is true.

VERNON SCANNELL

The Men Who Wear My Clothes

SLEEPLESS I lay last night and watched the slow
Procession of the men who wear my clothes:
First the grey man with bloodshot eyes and sly
Gestures miming what he loves and loathes.

Next came the cheery knocker-back of pints,
The beery joker, never far from tears,
Whose loud and public vanity acquaints
The careful watcher with his private fears.

And then I saw the neat mouthed gentle man
Defer politely, listen to the lies,
Smile at the tedious tale and gaze upon
The little mirrors in the speaker's eyes.

The men who wear my clothes walked past my bed
And all of them looked tired and rather old;
I felt a chip of ice melt in my blood.
Naked I lay last night, and very cold.

PETER REDGROVE

Disguise

COAT over arm I step off the moss-silenced stairs
On to thick turf that drains noise
And makes the heaviest walk like shadows; I
Have fat that hangs over me like heavy clothes
In wet sobbing creases, and I dash the sweat away
like flies.
What do the people around see besides?
A young head, small and bony, smooth and rosy,
Nipple-pated to the shirt-bright paunch,
As I'm well aware, and people are upset by characters;
I have a body thirty years my senior.

House with grounds . . .
Very well then, I will join the scene,
Join in by subterfuge; the lake's attractive
With the lilies massed like flock beds near
The strutted wooden bridge, an ornament,
That skips to the birdhouse on the marooned island.
I thumb the ground past faster. I will join the scene,
But not before I've bent with kilting paunch
To pry this midge out of the water-drop,
And held it out on pencil-point, clung like a wet feather,
Into the breeze to dry,
Struggling to its lashes, frail diagram.

The lazy bench-beams wheeze to me as I shake off my tie,
Unleash my neck, breath hissing hard, buried heart
pounding,
Lean back and watch the shadows sliding through the
lake,
And think of it iced, cool sheets and plates,
And see the flame has gripped the chestnuts,
Hear the wind hiss through them, and close my eyes,
Spread a clean handkerchief slowly over my face . . .

And look the part, an old gentleman relaxing
On his accustomed bench in unswept leaves,
Relaxing to the leaf-hiss, braces swooping
Round calm stoutness in the dottle of the year,
Only the margin of the white cloth fluttering—
A gentle snoozing laid beneath a cloth—
Only quick coolnesses from people passing close.

RAYMOND WILSON

Escape

AT first, collusion mumbled on the dark,
A sentry coughing somewhere in the cold,
With searchlights ranging, opening up like fans
(Cracked walls—ranged beds) and closing, fold on fold.

Next the elaborate deceit by day,
Grotesque charades of innocence, a blind
Man's bluff of whistled danger, panic cough,
Sudden disaster in a scratched behind.

It seemed so easy, since beyond all doubt
The enemy was dull as he was vile:
How could the merely brutal storm our dreams,
The crassly ignorant outwit our guile?

Meanwhile, the tunnel, womb to our despair,
Grew granite to the touch, broke man by man
The best of us (the worst as usual sneered,
Abandoning all interest in the plan).

At last just one, who dug for digging's sake,
Hunched in the hot vomit of his fear,
Through slit eyes, acid with his stinging sweat,
Laboured a dream from granite, saw appear

Day, that ran crumbling at his finger-tips,
Light spilling to the grave like grains of sand,
Air sweet as syrup, and the green earth's roots—
Aspiring harvest—cradled in his hand.

ZULFIKAR GHOSE

Getting To Know Fish

I

BEING a good Mohammedan, father said:
'Friday is the day to pray and throw bread
to the fish.' In Sialkot was a river,
and I in my sailor suit four years old
walked to it holding my father's finger;
we had flour mother had kneaded and rolled
into balls, and scraps of food grown green with mould.

From the bridge I aimed at fish, my moth-balls
of flour changing shapes—first as shells
humming in the air, then like grated cheese
settling on the water as on a dish.
The fish came and swallowed, the water creased
with waves and father said: 'Let's go pray and wish
for goodness now that we have fed the fish.'

The mosque had a goldfish pond with tiny
fish—as good a proof of God as any.
I never prayed. The Arabic was too
subtle and I'd only blow bubbles through my teeth.
I sat by the pond (a foot stuck into
the water, kicking fish when the old priest
wasn't looking) and felt heaven with my feet.

II

Bombay's famous fish is called Bombay Duck.
Slim and lazy-eyed like English Haddock,
it is a small fish, dried in the sun,
hanging, hooked to string, among coconut trees.
It stinks. When dry, it is boiled and eaten
with rice; through the hollows of its eyes
the bone-juice is pressed out, salted and spiced.

For ten years I avoided Bombay Duck,
took myself to the sea and tried my luck
with other fish. At home mother preferred
Pomfret, a flat fish (delicious when fried);
welcome at table, its presence was humoured
always with praise of its good taste; the pride
of a party dinner, the flesh at its sides

was good and the bone at its centre clean.
It would not cut your tongue or stick between
your teeth; its small mouth, even on the plate,
remained open in a smile, its eyes shone;
it was a fish you simply could not hate.
When warm from the sea, its belly was blown
as a priest's, its scales were sequins on a gown.

III

The tiny fresh-water fish of Sialkot
were as the rubber toys around my cot,
and I a sailor and the fish my fleet.
When playing mum and dad with a cousin,
we would cook them and call the dolls to eat.
Then, chasing my cousin through the garden,
I'd lose her; she would slip into seas of her own.

In childhood all fish were there as poor friends
to feed and keep; purple-backed and long, with fins
that cut and eyes that opened once and shut
for days, or little red puff-balls with no eyes
at all, they had no name. Fish was fish. But,
growing older, I was shown qualities
between fish and fish, and given a choice.

It was the smell of drying Bombay Duck
that told me 'Here's something I mustn't touch'.
Its skin tightening over the bone, its mouth
(with a tongue of salt) gaping in pleasure
of not needing its flesh, it shed its own youth
to the sun.
There are other, much simpler
fish which keep themselves whole. Those, I prefer.

RAYMOND GARLICK

Mexican in Wales

AS you pass the padlocked chapels
under the streaming skies,
we contemplate your image
through the cacti in our eyes.

Do you feel the weight upon you,
in the hot sun of our stare,
of the poncho and sombrero
which you say you do not wear?

Behind the twitching curtains
the girls begin to sway
to the strumming of guitars
which you say you cannot play.

I brood on Quetzalcoatl
the worshipped serpent-bird,
and Greene and D. H. Lawrence,
of whom you have not heard.

Maya, Toltec, Aztec—
the coloured words cohere
round the unsuspecting shoulders
of a stranded engineer.

DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE

Dark Caesar's Child

YOU are the thirty-third this month,
flesh of the swelling mother-fruit.
Your swollen mouth

is silent. Strapped polythene veins
swoop blood to your mother's dry shell,
the sap-filled vines

pricked into black ankle and wrist.
Quickly, precise, the needles shoot
swiftly to wrest

the bruised gash closed. The cloaking gauze
breathes tremulously in the smell
of magicked gas

lingering in the starched white room.
Your mother is fine, little man,
so why so glum?

Perhaps because the room is up-
side down and white faces dream new.
Strain, strive to cap

this achievement of birth and *live.*
There are more spells but, *start your span,*
become alive.

Your raisin face wrinkles with fear.
The cave is closed. Breathing in, you
attack the air.

N. Rhodesia.

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EDWIN BROCK

Love's labour

LOOKING for love I find the thing love leaves;
when windows open dirty curtains blow;
the whores and I perform as thick as thieves;
one makes a crust and one has one to show.

From everyone I take what I receive;
to everyone I answer blow with blow;
I keep my heart in chains upon my sleeve
more easily to dry the tears that flow.

I know there must be trust if I deceive;
I learn the lines of every Romeo
and count the breathless blessings I receive
as payment for the craft that I follow.

The love I lose is what I most believe,
believing there was once a love to go,
for this at least allows a loss to grieve
and grieving bears a body to bestow.

DAVID WEVILL

Pigeons

PIGEONS keep to herds, move with the grass
Docile to winds; proclaiming rights
To carriageway and towpath over men.
They are invincible because we are polite,

Afraid to anger, knowing we are violent
By nature as their red wire legs are weak;
Believing violence must be kept among men
As pigeons keep their herds, to save their necks.

They have no rational doubts. A park
Winters and feeds them, follows their
Harmless dragon footprints with frozen crumbs
Of man's habit. Pigeons unnerve us there,

Alive, grey, indifferent in the snow waste;
Are no longer toys or children
Assembled around our hand; but are survivals
Of a time when stones broke free of ice and

Slid into glacial rivers. Such can survive
By grace; to be kept and fed, as though we fear
That in the cold bread fingers of our offering
Their touch outlasts earth's rock, its wasting fire.

GODFREY JOHN

Counsel for Rosalind

BEWARE the cry whose urgent note demands
time in a myth of roses to come true,
reckons your body down its falling sands,
betrays the tense that ultimates in you.

Reject the lie that words its way along
your purposing, that stirs your hands to prove
the dual measure of my instrument:
the strings' prerogative proclaims me wrong!

Deny my voice—but listen to the song
whose falling tone translates this counsel through
the lyric dark between us. Hear the man
whose sounding reckons one love out of two.

U.S.A.

PAUL EDWARDS

Senility

ALL day he sits in the same place—on the veranda
which late in the afternoon catches the heat of
the setting sun. It's hard to believe that he
remembers or sees anything: although there's a lawn
stretching down to a line of poplars and a border
of flowers and birds hunting for ripe worms to stretch,
most of the time he seems not to be looking at *them,*
but at the floor. Even when he whispers, asking for "food"
or to be lifted in his chair, it doesn't seem that
his mind has registered a fundamental bodily discomfort
but that his limbs are emitting messages pre-recorded
years ago
in preparation, that the needle is caught and wont move
on.
Impaired vision; fumbling, inexact use of limbs;
a penetrating
but not disagreeable odour rising from girlishly white
and hairless
legs and loins—these have registered to a slight degree,
at least
to his wife and mentally-defective son who call to see him
each evening with bundles of clothes, more tobacco,
more flowers.

His case-file tells of the hospitals he has left because
his condition could no longer be countered by medicine:
it tells
of one journey home (it will be his last), his return when
his wife became too frail to answer his needs any more,
and his exact complaints—arterio-sclerosis and
"increasing senility".
Senility, at one with the heavy atmosphere in the
veranda

on a warm afternoon and burning dressings (the flames
almost
invisible in the bright sunlight). . . . One cannot
ascribe it to the
exhaust of life or the dense waste from passion,
these romantic
fallacies give place to the reality, however conditional,
of a few
everyday incidents. . . . Those here who know, doctor,
visiting priest,
nurses, all say the same thing—"In his own way he
is happy"
but the operative words are 'In his own way' and
today he
told of a longing to return to his country cottage and
his wife.

Still the birds strut on the grass, forever pecking.
There must be a warning here if only one could find it:
at least from handling him, seeing him half-naked on
his soiled morning bed, I tell myself that when I die
my general condition cannot, will not be like his.
And the unnoticed birds and the flowers that are not really
beautiful to him, disappear and close with evening.
The birds
will never be like him, will never spend (perhaps) years
of inactivity merely trying to keep clean, trying to sleep
when sleep should be distant, trying not to be a nuisance
(always apologetic), trying to ignore the obvious
impatience
of nurses. The birds will one day lose the air and the
breezes
on which gliding becomes second nature and will die after
a short pause, having lost everything in one last exertion.

DONALD THOMAS

Metropolis

All custom grew towards this river land,
A ritual circle like a children's dance,
Within which golden courts and crowns were planned
To rise; and fell to this same clutch of stone.
All spells locked fortune till an evil chance
Broke circles and brought dome's vault spinning down.

Tribes built a winter city at this flood
In year's white morning as the ice-trap sealed:
Came in dry season from the withered field,
Honoured the summer river with their gods.

When each device, arch, buttress failed them there
Bright slogans choked old parables, the best
Rites dwindled to a faceless law. Desire
For private crimes to fill each public square
With scribbled insult, beckoned siege or pest
With nameless and inevitable fire.

Dead walls like rock formations stood aloof
From canyons of the fallen towers: among
Scorched crags the pillars of a temple hung
At crazy angles to the broken roof.

Now sleek-layered pasture wraps charred hulks from sight,
Burying bricks cracked in the frost's tight rings:
Ice following fire splits the black wreck once more.
As birds fly east against this sky's cold light
The stir of wind across the green flats brings
A thin rain singing at the hub's burnt core.

THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. TOMLINSON

Seeing is Believing: Charles Tomlinson (O.U.P. 12s. 6d.).
The Gravel Ponds: Peter Levi S.J. (Deutsch, 10s. 6d.).
A Letter to the Living: Charles Hamblett (Putnam, 8s. 6d.).

MR. TOMLINSON is an odd case. He is English—but his reputation has been made on the other side of the Atlantic. For the past couple of years American critics have been somewhat self-righteously reproaching us for our neglect of him. Now, on the tardy appearance of his first volume over here, a ragged chorus of praise has gone up. How I wish I could join in! Not to like Mr. Tomlinson's work is to brand oneself as stuffy and parochial. And, if one sticks to his intentions rather than his performance, there is much to admire. For one thing, he is deeply serious about the nature and function of poetry. He believes that poets can and should tackle big themes, that moral concern is part of the poet's equipment. He tries to build his work on a coherent philosophy. But, alas, good intentions alone have never been enough to make successful poetry.

How does Mr. Tomlinson fail? First, and simply, in matters of technique. For one so evidently influenced by Stevens, Pound and Auden, he has an oddly insensitive ear. Take this passage from *A Meditation on John Constable:*

> "He replied to his own question, and with the unmannered
> Exactness of art; enriched his premises
> By confirming his practice: the labour of observation
> In the face of meteorological fact. Clouds
> Followed by others, temper the sun in passing
> Over and off it. Massed darks
> Blotting it back, scattered and mellowed shafts
> Break damply out of them, until the source
> Unmasks, floods its retreating bank
> With raw fire."

Even a casual inspection can't fail to reveal the rather flaccid diction. A reading aloud discloses how cacophonous it is—the lines are overloaded with sibilants, crowded with dissonances. Mr. Tomlinson has claimed in the past to be aiming at "the hardness of crystals, the facets of cut glass" in his work; here he seems to achieve the grittiness of gravel.

The passage I've just quoted also brings out another of Mr. Tomlinson's faults. For a poet who is so concerned with what things look like (he writes a lot about painters and painting) he

is rather bad at visual descriptions. The clouds are elaborately described, true, but in a muffled and oblique kind of way, "massed darks, blotting it back" and so forth. And the passage ends on a cliché—"raw fire". Even where the descriptive writing is more successful it is always our minds it appeals to, and not our senses. We understand (more or less) how things looked to Mr. Tomlinson, but we don't apprehend them afresh.

These surface faults, however, would not loom large if the poems in *Seeing is Believing* reached interesting conclusions, had new statements to make. I can't see that they do—and, personally, I find Mr. Tomlinson's portentous tone in telling me things I knew already rather galling. To be offered the two lines:

"The sea laps by the railroad tracks.
To have admitted this also defines the sea."

at the conclusion of a poem entitled *The Mediterranean* is irritating, not only because the statement is so obvious, but because the attitude of mind which it implies is so naïve.

Nor is it very interesting or exciting to be informed that

"Art exists at a remove.
Evocation, at two,
Discusses a blue that someone
Heard someone talking about."

Here and there in the book are things which make one think that Mr. Tomlinson's admirers are not wholly mistaken in their enthusiasm. *The Churchyard Wall* is a fine, plain-spoken poem which deals with the fact of death through simple symbols. It is work in the unpretentious tradition of Frost and Edward Thomas, and none the worse for that. And though the conclusion is expressed with a certain clumsiness, one accepts it as valid and moving:

"They leave completed
Their intent and useful labours to be ignored,
To pass into common life, a particle
Of the unacknowledged sustenance of the eye,
Less serviceable than a house, but in a world of houses
A merciful structure. The wall awaits decay."

Mr. Peter Levi is a less ambitious poet than Mr. Tomlinson —romantic in a rather woolly kind of way, fond of the big gesture. His main faults seem to be those of inexperience. He is, for example, notably deficient in his control of tone. In course

of a single stanza he shifts from the crisply satirical to the boomingly oratorical:

> "The Catalonian Communist
> is dead, or abroad, or doing fine,
> with a wife to keep him warm
> or an exile magazine,
> and the heart's foghorn, dull in mist,
> can bring no living ship to harm."

He also indulges in that kind of half-parody, half-pastiche of other poets which is a mark of uncertainty. Yeats is one of his models for this kind of treatment:

> "I reverence John Cotman and John Crome,
> Sandby and Cozens. You are my masters, Richard
> Wilson and David Cox, but long and hard
> schooling of your thoughts you give me."

While I enjoyed reading Mr. Levi's book, I certainly find myself a little astonished that it should bear on its cover the words—"Choice of the Poetry Book Society."

Mr. Hamblett is a very different kind of writer to Mr. Levi and Mr. Tomlinson. Where they might be accused of living in an ivory tower, he is all in favour of getting close to the raw and the real. This leads him to write like this:

> "Sitting in the public square
> With all the other slobs and hipsters
> I want to roar:
> This is America! Let spirits soar!
> I want to tell these scattered brothers
> They have clarified the word Democracy
> Along with Whitman, Crane and a
> Lot of other crazy bums
> I want to say—
> Accept your blessings, neighbours,
> *Count your crumbs.*

and like this:

> "Ah, she was a woman
> Hotly sprawling
> She truly woman
> Her tender calling
> Born of America's
> Hard and Indian Hills

And she all riddle
Flesh and beauty
And she full woman
Woman of manforged strength
I took her naked
With joyful longing
Kissed her great body
Handled her with skill
But thunder gathered
I should have held her
She walked off smiling
Dear God, I love her still!"

One wonders, in a dazed kind of way, how writing of this kind ever finds its way into print.

EDWARD LUCIE-SMITH.

Collected Poems: Lawrence Durrell (Faber, 21s.).
Collected Poems: William Plomer (Cape, 18s.).
Collected Poems: Edwin Muir (Faber, 25s.).

WHEN reviewing Lawrence Durrell's *Selected Poems* a few years ago, I remarked that, possibly in the interests of variety and balance, a number of exceptional poems had been omitted. I am glad to report that they have all been included in the *Collected Poems—In Crisis, Bere Regis, Blind Homer, A Water-Colour of Venice, Rodini, Penelope, The Tree of Idleness, Letter to Seferis the Greek,* and others. Mr. Durrell is an excellent craftsman and succeeds in making an appeal to both intellect and feeling; indeed, even his slightest poems (and admittedly he is often slight) are interesting and enjoyable to read. He has a happy knack of using such apt and original phraseology:

"A village like an instinct left to rust,
Composed around the echo of a pistol-shot."

Much has been made of his Mediterranean landscapes, but it ought to be pointed out that the landscape pieces are never merely poems of place or subtle evocations of atmosphere; they combine, in addition, a personal sense of life and history and sensuality and humour, in such a way that it would be difficult

not to recognise a poem of Durrell's. His *Collected Poems* demonstrate his remarkable range of mood and subject, and the nature of his very real achievement.

Although William Plomer divides his collection into sections under such headings as *African Poems, Poems Written in Japan, Philhellenisms, London Ballads and Poems,* etc., as if to call attention to the importance of place in his work also, it is his interest in people which distinguishes this volume. Nor does it always appear to be a sympathetic interest. Mr. Plomer is, of course, widely known for his ballads—*French Lisette, Mews Flat Mona, The Playboy of the Demi-World* and so on—but it seems to me that, even at their most entertaining, these poems have only a limited value; and they are often lacking in taste and unnecessarily cruel. Far better, to my mind, are the poems in which he achieves a cold precision and accuracy of description—the work of the painter recording strictly what is seen and deliberately underplaying the emotional bias which presents itself elsewhere. In this genre Mr. Plomer makes his points by careful deployment of language and a shrewd technique, though in the early South African poems he was inclined to raise his voice to express his indignation. This descriptive fluency is seen at its best in poems like *The Devil Dancers, Captain Maru* and *John Drew* (the last two grouped together here in the section titled *Two Portraits*). But most impressive of all are the serious and imaginative poems displaying a Symbolist influence. Of these *A Traveller's Tale* is probably one of the most outstanding. It is pleasing to note that the author has been scrupulous in revision and wise enough to eliminate a good many of his trivial pieces.

The final volume of poems by the late Edwin Muir contains the *Collected Poems* of 1952, the whole of *One Foot in Eden* (1956) and thirty-eight poems written in the few years before his death in 1959. With this collection before us, it is difficult to understand why Muir's work has not—at least, until quite recently—been given the recognition it deserves. It would seem that during the twentieth century the poets who have attracted most attention have been those whose individual talents compelled them to create a new style of expression, or, among the less gifted, those who have been quick to respond to changing trends. The emphasis has, to a large extent, been placed upon technique—one is tempted to say novelty of technique. If this has had a beneficial effect upon the idiom and rhythm of poetry, it has also led to the comparative neglect of such a poet as Edwin Muir—a man of retiring nature and a poet who was content to pursue his own line of development

within the main stream of English tradition. This volume provides clear evidence of an acute awareness of the problems of our age and a maturity of thought rare among the poets of this century.

HOWARD SERGEANT.

Some Men are Brothers: D. J. Enright (Chatto & Windus, 10s. 6d.).
A Common Grace: Norman MacCaig (Chatto & Windus, 10s. 6d.).
The World I See: Patric Dickinson (Chatto & Windus, 10s. 6d.).

MR. ENRIGHT'S latest volume is divided into four sections under the headings of *Siam, Berlin, Japan* and *Displaced,* but it would be a mistake to assume that these poems are the superficial reflections or impressions of the casual visitor to other countries. For, despite the low tension of the poetry, the lines thrown away, the wry wit and irony with which he attempts to camouflage his individual response and his personal feelings, Mr. Enright is by no means as detached as he would apparently have the reader believe, In a way, the most outstanding poems in this volume, from all the sections, could be assembled under the *Displaced* heading, for they are all imbued by a sense of man's spiritual rootlessness. At his most effective—that is, when he forgets that he is supposed to be non-committal—he makes his point with ease :

"Charity. Oh yes, all this we'd seen was charity.
Make a picture of where your heart once bled.
Move the world's conscience, or provoke an incident—
all simpler than to fill an empty mouth with bread."

Unfortunately, the camouflage is often so perfect, the restraint so calculated to tone down any suggestion of pity, that nothing worth saying is in fact said; and one gains the impression that something has deliberately been withheld. The best poems are those in which the poet has been least inhibited by the now-old-fashioned conventions of the 'fifties, which demanded a neutral tone and a negative attitude.

Mr. Norman MacCaig is altogether a better craftsman and uses words for their effect, as in *A Man and a Boat* :

"It was his honey of environment
Where acquiescence was easy, the place where he
Became transparent and was heaven-sent.

He was easy in it as a fox is in his coat.
And it was his own idea, identity,
Large, better and battered self, and still afloat.

It was haunted by crabs and breathed of Stockholm tar.
It looked like melodeon music and took the waves
In a bucking jig-time, six to the blessed bar."

Yet though Mr. MacCaig has such an admirable technique and a lively vocabulary, it is unlikely that the ordinary reader of poetry will fall under his spell if he continues in his present direction. In his "exploration of that mysterious territory where mind and matter come into contact", his work is becoming more and more tenuous and lacking in human qualities—in this respect he seems to have a growing affinity with Charles Tomlinson. This tendency towards epistemological dabbling is, to my mind, deplorable in a poet who has such a tremendous potentiality for the rich and imaginative poetry we are so much in need of at the present time.

The World I See is a collection of competent and interesting verse, but few of the poems ever get off the ground. "Nobody sees the world I see", complains Mr. Dickinson in the title-poem, but it is not until one reaches the *Poems from Cumberland,* in the second section of the book, that one is given any kind of individual presentation, and the poems come to life.

MARTIN RAINFORD

Chiaroscuro Marjorie Battcock (3s.).
Morning in Ankara: Michael Thorpe (3s.).
Strange Habitation: Ian Lovelock (3s.).
In Time of Need: Edith Pickthall (3s.).
The Lost Knight: Francis Newbold (3s. 6d.).

OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS

THE first booklet in the above list is aptly titled, for Mrs. Battcock is as much concerned with contrasts in human feelings and situations as she is fascinated by the play of light and shade in her response to landscapes and cities. One might say that a compassionate attitude, which never gives way to sentimentality, is the keynote to her poems. If, for instance, on the way to Brussels, it is the "pencil strokes of sunlight" on the shuttered streets or

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the cornstooks "stippled to blonde" in the early morning light which catch her attention, these initial impressions serve merely to set up, and provide the atmosphere for, a deeper train of thought which at once takes over and directs the poem. Mrs. Battcock has a descriptive fluency and a gift for evocative statement :

> "Here is absorbed an age's agony
> As the canal absorbs the summer sky."

and is more convincing when she is dealing with actual situations, such as that of *The Refugee* or *Country Circus,* than when she lapses into abstractions,

Morning in Ankara, by Michael Thorpe, begins with a group of "Turkish" poems which demonstrate the author's capacity for presenting what the eye sees in a few vivid strokes, and which establish the tone for the collection as a whole. Mr. Thorpe has a sense of the incongruous— in *Here Stood Nine-Times Troy* he places "Hector's shameful wall" in conjunction with the local Odeon—and a useful command of diction, but so far he is a little too content to restrict himself to mere snippets of experience.

Mr. Ian Lovelock appears to be an urban poet and his *Strange Habitation* is located in a Midlands' city, possibly Birmingham, the subject of one of his poems. It is encouraging to observe that he is not afraid of taking risks, either in the choice of theme or in the individual use of words and phrases. Two of his best poems, *Suicide* and *Two Kinds of Pain in a Ward,* are attempts to come to grips with more ambitious subjects and they are largely successful :

> "But can it be these blocks and rows of beds
> like squares and pawns
> are there to make compassion orderly
> seeing so much of regimented pain
> tidily departmentalised?"

In Time of Need, on the other hand, has a peaceful rural background which nothing seems to disturb. Miss Edith Pickthall writes pleasingly of wild birds and village characters versed in country lore, of trees in February "criss crossed like lattice work against the sky", and of the changing seasons of the English countryside with its farms and decaying manor houses, all so remote from the turmoil and restlessness of city life.

Mr. R. F. Willetts is a skilled craftsman with an almost classical reverence for form. His poetry reflects a sense of history (*Roman Orange, Delhi Fort*), and an interest in mythological subjects

(*Zeus on a Coin, Minoan Fresco*), combined with an intelligent awareness of the human situation today—the separate poems and subjects reacting one upon the other in a surprisingly propitious manner. The title poem, perhaps the most outstanding, is ironically concerned with the fate of an island people previously untouched by modern civilisation :

> "And very wise in their simple way
> They treated life as a sort of play
> Where all the characters were so closely linked
> That even a Freudian might have blinked."

At first glance, *The Lost Knight* seems to be the work of a confirmed cynic since Mr. Newbold portrays, in some of his poems, the Knight Errant who has become a "fat old merchant dreaming of gold", love that has deteriorated into mechanical habit, time chipping the statues and rotting the books, and the leader disillusioned by events :

> "I was the man to carry out the contract
> Charged with the crude necessity to act
> That fathers on the dream the changeling fact
> That no new world is born—"

Yet a closer reading of the text of these poems, with all their implications, reveals that if the author refuses to be taken in by his own romantic attitudes, he is an idealist preoccupied with real values. In such pieces as *To D. H. Lawrence, The Millenium, Prayer for a Horror Camp,* and *Letter to a Ghost* he makes a frontal assault upon contemporary problems which, directly or indirectly, affect us all. There are some first rate poems in this booklet and, with all respect to this admirable *Outposts* Series, Mr. Newbold's work deserves to be collected in more durable form.

JOHN SEYMOUR.

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NOTICES

OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS. The latest additions to the *Outposts* Series of booklets are: *Strange Habitation* by Ian Lovelock, *The Lost Knight* by Francis Newbold, *Dialectic* by James Hinton, *Rhyme's Vexations* by Nicodemus, *Death and Change* by Erica Johnson, and *Time Remembered* by Kenneth Prosser.

THE P.E.N. ANTHOLOGY. *New Poems 1962* will be edited by Vernon Scannell, Patricia Beer and Ted Hughes. Contributions are invited for consideration and should be sent to The Editors of *New Poems 1962*, P.E.N., 62 Glebe Place, London, S.W.3. Not more than two poems should be submitted by each poet, and all manuscripts should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. Closing date: 31st January, 1961. Poems which have appeared in book form cannot be accepted, though work which has been published in periodicals is eligible.

THE DULWICH GROUP. Monthly readings of poetry are held by the Dulwich Group at the Crown and Greyhound, Dulwich Village, London, S.E.21, on the last Wednesday of each month (except December, when the meeting will be put forward to the 14th). These meetings are free to the public, though a collection is taken to defray expenses. The Crown and Greyhound is easily reached from North Dulwich Station (London Bridge) and Herne Hill (Victoria). It is close to the No. 37 bus route.

THE HEADLANDS, poems by Howard Sergeant (published by Putnams) can be ordered through local booksellers or obtained from this address, price 8s. including postage. "Those who despair of the aims and values of modern poetry should ponder Mr. Sergeant and think again."—*Contemporary Review.*